

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

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This may seem a very simple question, and very easily answered; but many who think so, would really be very much at a loss to answer it correctly. Every man, in a free country, wants three sorts of education: one, to fit him for his own particular trade or calling—this is professional education; another, to teach him his duties as a man and a citizen—this is moral and political education; and a third, to fit him for his higher relations, as God's creature, designed for immortality—this is religious education. Now, in point of fact, that is most useful to a man which tends most to his happiness; a thing so plain, that it seems foolish to state it. Yet people constantly take the word "useful" in another sense, and mean by it, not what tends most to a man's happiness, but what tends most to get money for him; and therefore they call professional education a very useful thing: but the time which is spent in general education, whether moral or religious, they are apt to grudge as thrown away, especially if it interferes with the other education, to which they confine the name of "useful;" that is, the education which enables a man to gain his livelihood. Yet we might all be excellent in our several trades and professions, and still be very ignorant, very miserable, and very wicked. We might do pretty well just while we were at work on our business; but no man is at work always. There is a time which we spend with our families; a time which we spend with our friends and neighbors; and a very important time which we spend with ourselves. If we know not how to pass these times well, we are very contemptible and worthless men, though we may be very excellent lawyers, surgeons, chemists, engineers, mechanics, laborers, or whatever else may

be our particular employment. Now, what enables us to pass these times well, and our times of business also, is not our *professional* education, but our *general* one. It is the education which all need equally—namely, that which teaches a man, in the first place, his duty to God and his neighbor: which trains him to good principles and good temper; to think of others, and not only of himself. It is that education which teaches him, in the next place, his duties as a citizen—to obey the laws always, but to try to get them made as perfect as possible; to understand that a good and just government cannot consult the interests of one particular class of calling, in preference to another, but must see what is for the good of the whole; but every interest, and every order of men, must give and take; and that if each were to insist upon having every thing its own way, there would be nothing but the wildest confusion, or the merest tyranny. And because a great part of all that goes wrong in public or private life arises from ignorance and bad reasoning, all that teaches us, in the third place, to reason justly, and puts us on our guard against the common tricks of unfair writers and talkers, or the confusions of such as are puzzle-headed, is a most valuable part of a man's education, and one of which he will find the benefit whenever he has the occasion to open his mouth to speak, or his ears to hear. And, finally, all that makes a man's mind more active, and the ideas which enter it nobler and more beautiful, is a great addition to his happiness whenever he is alone, and to the pleasures which others derive from his company when he is in society. Therefore it is most *useful* to learn to love and understand what is *beautiful*, whether in the works of God, or in those of man; whether in the flowers and fields, and rocks and woods, and rivers, and sea and sky; or in fine buildings, or fine pictures, or fine music; and in the noble thoughts and glorious images of poetry. This is the education which will make a man, and a people good, and wise, and happy. Give this, and the ends of professional education can never be altogether lost; for good sense and good principle will insure a man's knowing his particular business; but knowledge of his business, on the other hand, will not insure them; and not only are sense and goodness the rarest and most profitable qualities with which any man can enter upon life now, but they are articles of which there never can be a glut: no competition or over-production will lessen their value; but the more of them that we can succeed in manufacturing, so much the higher will be their price, because there will be more to understand and to love them.